Well Traveled: World-Class Art, History, and Cuisine Abound in Charleston

The city oozes Southern charm—and is where The Dallas Opera's boardmember Susan Geyer has a second home.

By Brandon J. Call | April 3, 2023 | 9:15 pm | Photography courtesy of The Beach Club at Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina, Explore Charleston, and Shutterstock

Grand Entry: With its stunning canopy of trees first planted in the 1740s, the Avenue of Oaks leads to Boone Hall.

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Like a glass of sweet tea on a hot summer day, few places are more refreshing than Charleston, South Carolina. Dubbed one of the friendliest communities in the United States, it is a treasure trove of natural beauty, antebellum architecture, and world-class cuisine that buzzes with the energy of a major metro while retaining its undeniable small-town charm.

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Steeped in history, Charleston was founded a century before the United States became a country. On a walking tour of downtown, landmarks can be discovered around every turn, including the famous Heyward-Washington House, where President George Washington was wined and dined in May 1791 during a weeklong series of lavish dinners and revelry. (A foreshadowing of my own trip, indeed.) Make time to detour to the 215-year-old Historic Charleston City Market for a souvenir or two. The open-air bazaar is among the oldest in the country and features everything from produce to antiques, mementos, and one-of-a-kind artwork from more than 100 vendors.

First Class: A luxury waterfront resort, The Beach Club at Charleston Harbor Resort and Marina impresses.

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During the tour, it's impossible not to be transported back in time by the cobblestone streets and pastel-hued homes of Rainbow Row, a series of 13 colorful historic residences that date back to the 1740s. The tour culminates in a stroll along Waterfront Park and ends at another can't-miss site: Pineapple Fountain, an iconic focal point among the city's most photographed attractions.

Escaping the bustle of downtown with a 15-minute ferry ride, The Beach Club at Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina in Mount Pleasant serves as the ideal home base for exploring. From the seersucker robes in the handsomely appointed guest rooms to the nautical-themed décor throughout, the resort is seaside chic without being pretentious. Its crown jewel is an enormous Instagram-worthy resort-style pool, perfect for lounging under a cabana and enjoying a chilled glass of rosé and pimento cheese.

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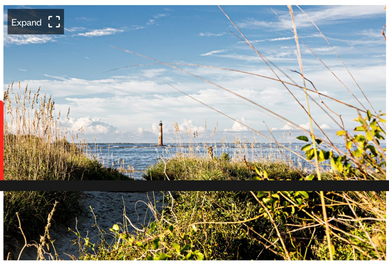
I don't need to wander far from the resort to discover mouth-watering Southern fare. The hotel's Fish House is a go-to for acclaimed Lowcountry cooking for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. My favorite dish is the signature shrimp and grits, which are so fresh and tasty I swear my grandma fixed 'em. After breakfast one morning, I work off the calorie overload—and learn a thing or two about tacking and jibing—during a private lesson from the championship College of Charleston sailing team. (Pro tip: head out to the marina docks early to catch a peek of a surfacing dolphin or two.)



Island Time: Folly Beach is a prime destination for those who like to fish and surf and lovers of a laid-back lifestyle.

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There's plenty to discover nearby, too. Mount Pleasant is home to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum and its World War II-era aircraft carrier, the USS Yorktown. The resort provides bikes for a relaxing ride along the picturesque Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge. Fort Sumter National Monument, which sits at the mouth of the Charleston Harbor and is accessible via ferry, is the site of the beginning of the American Civil War.

Finally, you're missing out on a true regional delicacy if you visit Charleston and don't eat boiled peanuts. No-frills Timbo's Hot Boiled Peanuts is the place to stop for a heaping bag of plain, Cajun, or ham-flavored snacks. And the best way to wash them down is with an ice-cold glass of, you guessed it, Southern sweet tea.

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A Lover of the Performing Arts

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A 45-minute drive from Charleston, Kiawah Island is a luxury beach resort town on the Atlantic Coast. Home to five-star accommodations and championship golf courses, it is also where Susan Geyer, a Dallas Opera board member, has a second home. Every year, the art aficionado blocks off the 17 days in late May and early June for Charleston's renowned Spoleto Festival USA. Featuring both established and emerging artists in more than 150 performances, Spoleto attracts an eclectic, global lineup. "Spoleto combines all of my favorite performing arts," Geyer says. "There's everything from chamber music and ballet to theatrical plays, opera, symphony orchestras, and more. It's a wonderful three weeks of well-planned, well-curated programming."